

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL POSS DUPE

PAGE 01 BANGKO 00846 161233Z

53

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 NIC-01 /061 W
----- 051058

R 161121Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9872

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0846

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SGEN, TH

SUBJECT: ACTIVIST MONKS CHALLENGE THE HIERARCHY

REF: A) BANGKOK 19138; B) BANGKOK 19287; C) FBIS D090230
DEC 74

SUMMARY:

POLITICAL ACTIVISM AMONG THE MONKS CONTINUES AND NOW CHALLENGES THE BUDDHIST HIERARCHY ITSELF. ACTIVIST MONKS, LED BY FIVE MONKS ON A HUNGER STRIKE, ARE DEMANDING THAT THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL AND THE SUPREME PATRIARCH RESTORE THE ECCLESIASTICAL RANKS OF THE "RED MONKS" -- PHRA PIMONTHAM AND PHRA SATANASOPHON. THE CURRENT DEMONSTRATION IS FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF HOW WIDESPREAD HAS BECOME THE PUBLIC CHALLENGE TO TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY, VALUES, AND PATTERNS OF ACTION IN THAILAND. END SUMMARY.

1. SOCIAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM AMONG BUDDHIST MONKS, AS WE HAD EARLIER SUSPECTED (REF A), IS HERE TO STAY EVEN IF ONLY WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS ORDER ITSELF. ACTIVIST MONKS ARE NOW CHALLENGING THE BUDDHIST HIERARCHY, USING A TECHNIQUE MOST APPROPRIATE TO THEIR PARTICULAR ROLE AND VALUE ORIENTATION -- A PEACEFUL HUNGER STRIKE. PHRA THONGBAI INTATHATA, ONE OF THE LEADERS, POINTED OUT THAT PROTESTING MONKS HAD USED THE HUNGER STRIKE EVEN IN
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 00846 161233Z

THE TIME OF THE LORD BUDDHA. SOURCES AT WAT MAHATAT INFORMED US THAT ACTIVIST MONKS NUMBERED APPROXIMATELY 1000 AS OF

1700 JANUARY 16. MOST OF THEM ARE FROM UPCOUNTRY. THEY ARE DEMANDING THAT THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL RESTORE THE ECCLESIASTICAL RANKS AND POSITIONS OF THE "RED MONKS" -- PHRA PIMONTHAM AND PHRA SATANASOPHON.

2. FORMER PRIME MINISTER SARIT THANARAT ACCUSED THESE TWO MONKS OF BEING COMMUNISTS AND HAD THEM ARRESTED IN 1962. PHRA SATANASOPHON ALSO FACED CHARGES OF IMMORALITY. THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL DEMOTED THEM AND EXPELLED THEM FROM THE RELIGIOUS ADMINISTRATION. THEY WERE TRIED IN 1966, APPARENTLY CLEARED OF ALL CHARGES, AND RELEASED FROM JAIL. PHRA PIMONTHAM NEVERTHELESS DOES HAVE A RECORD OF ASSOCIATION WITH AND OPEN SUPPORT FOR COMMUNIST SPONSORED ACTIVITIES AND LEFTIST POLITICIANS. THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL HAS NEVER RESTORED THEIR RANKS OR POSITIONS.

3. ACTIVIST MONKS LEAD BY PHRA MAHA PRAYUN PALITHAMMO ON 19 DECEMBER 1974 DELIVERED A PETITION TO MR. PRASAN THONGPAKDI, DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT, DEMANDING THAT THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL RECONSIDER THE CASES OF PHRA PIMONTHAM AND PHRA SATANASOPHON. THE ACTIVISTS CLAIMED TO REPRESENT 4500 MONKS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND THREATENED FURTHER ACTION IF THEIR DEMANDS WERE NOT MET BY 8 JANUARY 1975. THE SUPREME PATRIARCH PROMISED TO REVIEW THE CASES AND MAKE A DECISION BY THAT DATE AND THE PROTESTORS DISPERSED.

4. THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL, HOWEVER, FAILED TO DELIVER ON THE PATRIARCH'S PROMISE. SOME 300 MONKS, THIS TIME LED BY PHRA MAHA THONGBAI INTHATHATA, GATHERED ON JANUARY 10 TO RESTATE THEIR DEMANDS AND RENEW THEIR PROTEST. PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE MONKS INTEND TO CONTINUE THE PROTEST UNTIL THE COUNCIL REINSTATES PHRA PIMONTHAM AND PHRA SATANASOPHON TO THEIR PREVIOUS POSITIONS. THE HUNGER STRIKE IS NOW IN ITS FIFTH DAY AND ALL FIVE FASTING MONKS ARE ON SALINE SOLUTION. THUS FAR THERE IS NO PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PROTEST -- OTHER THAN OCCASIONAL VISITS BY PEOPLE BRINGING FOOD TO THE MONKS IN THE COMPOUND. THE PROTESTORS ARE REMAINING WITHIN THE WAT MAHATAT COMPOUND
CONFIDENTIAL
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 00846 161233Z

BEHIND THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY. THE SUPREME PATRIARCH HAS AGREED TO MEET WITH PHRA PIMONTHAM AND PHRA SATANASSOPHON THE EVENING OF JANUARY 16. WE EXPECT THE NUMBER OF MONKS AT WAT MAHATAT TO INCREASE IN EXPECTATION OF SOME ANNOUNCEMENT AFTER THIS MEETING. THE SUPREME PATRIARCH HAS ALSO WARNED THE PROTESTING MONKS THAT EVEN THOUGH THEIR PROTEST IS PEACEFUL IT COULD LEAD TO AN UNTOWARD INCIDENT. THE MONKS LAUGHED AT AND BOOED HIS WARNING.

5. COMMENT: THE ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL IS LEARNING, AS IS

THE THAI GOVERNMENT, THAT IT CANNOT USE PROMISES OF ACTION TO DEFUSE A TENSE CONFRONTATION AND THEN NOT DELIVER. THE COUNCIL IS IN A DIFFICULT POSITION, HOWEVER, BECAUSE IF IT DOES RESTORE THE TWO MONKS TO THEIR ORIGINAL RANKS AND POSITIONS IT WILL THEREBY BRING SPOKESMEN INTO THE CONSERVATIVE HIERARCHY WHO WILL PRESS FOR FURTHER REFORM WITHIN THE CHURCH, INCLUDING THE RAISING OF YOUNGER MONKS TO POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY. PHRA PIMONTHAM AND HIS SUPPORTERS WILL ALSO, FOR EXAMPLE, CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR REFORM WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SYSTEM (REF C).

6. THE ACTIVIST MONKS ARE BEGINNING TO CHALLENGE THE RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY JUST AS THEIR CONTEMPORARIES IN THE SECULAR WORLD HAVE CHALLENGED THE THAI POLITICAL HIERARCHY. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT PROTEST, WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT SOME MONKS WILL REMAIN ACTIVIST-ORIENTED, AND APPEAR AGAIN AT FUTURE PROTESTS -- BOTH SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS.
KINTNER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, RELIGIOUS GROUPS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO00846
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750017-0341
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750148/aaaabpsj.tel
Line Count: 134
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BANGKOK 19138, 75 BANGKOK 19287, 75 FBIS D090230
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <23 JUL 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <20 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ACTIVIST MONKS CHALLENGE THE HIERARCHY
TAGS: PINT, SGEN, TH
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006